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THE POLITICAL PERSONALITY

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Abstract

Responsiveness to diverse groups in a pluralistic constituency was assumed to be a crucial consideration related to election to political office. Responsiveness was assumed to evolve from the interaction of two components of self-other orientation, self esteem and complexity of the self concept. The pattern of self-other orientation found least frequently among politicians (state legislators and superintendents of public schools in comparison with teachers and principals) was high self esteem, high complexity (the a-political personality pattern). Political candidates with this personality pattern were also elected to office less frequently. The results are interpreted within a framework of personality differentiation-integration.

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The Political Personality

Greenstein (1967) has recently noted the lack of systematic research relating personality and politics, although observers proliferate examples of political events that were critically mediated by the personal characteristics of the key actors. In response to the "Tatterdemalion nature of existing work in the field" (Greenstein, 1968), a theoretical and methodological analysis of the area of research was rendered by James D. Barber, Rufus P. Browning, Alexander L. George, Harold D. Lasswell, Neil J. Smelzer, David J. Singer, and M. Brewster Smith (See Greenstein, 1968). In contrast to earlier work, the study presented here involves a social psychological theory of personality. (Self-Other Orientation) and measures of the basic personality constructs. The measures involve topological representations of the self in relation to significant others. The verbal demands of the measures are minimal, thereby minimizing cause for dissembling. The central construct is the responsiveness of the political candidate. The dependent variable is election or appointment to political office.

The pattern of behavior viewed as crucial in American politics is the process of negotiation, accommodation, and bargaining among diverse groups under conditions of conflict. The relative power of the diverse groups is assumed to be a variable relevant to the consistency of political behavior. In an environment in which a single group or a coalition is clearly dominant, consistent political behavior congruent with the opinions of the power component of the constituency may be the basis for recruiting candidates and for political survival. Persons who practice this approach to politics may be described as ideologues. The ideologue is responsive

to a single dominant subgroup. On the other hand, where the balance of power among diverse subgroups is tenuous, a pragmatic approach to politics may be indicated. In this latter approach the politician seeks an ad hoc policy decision rather than a decision in terms of his own guiding principles or those emerging from the opinions of a given segment of the constituency. In this way the pragmatic politician avoids opposition based on his expected voting behavior since his responsive behavior is difficult to predict.

The crucial concept which evolves from this analysis of political behavior is latitude of responsiveness. Responsiveness by A is defined as a change in opinion of person A in the direction of greater agreement with those of person B. The ideologue responds consistently to a relatively narrow range of opinions, those supported by the dominant group in the constituency. The pragmatic politician is responsive to a pluralistic constituency. It is now proposed that latitude of responsiveness is associated with two components of self-other orientation: self esteem and complexity of the self concept (Ziller, Megas, & DeCencio, 1964; Ziller, Alexander, & Long, 1966; Ziller & Grossman, 1968; Ziller, Long, Ramana, & Reddy, 1968; Mossman & Ziller, 1968).

Self esteem is that component of the self system which is involved in the regulation of the extent to which the self system is maintained under conditions of strain such as during the processing of new information relative to the self. Thus, for example, either positive or negative evaluations do not evoke immediate corresponding action by the individual

with high self esteem. The response is mediated by the self concept. For example, new information relative to the self is examined in terms of its relevance and meaning for the self system and the social stimulus may be ignored or transformed in such a way as to maintain consistency in behavior. In this way the person is somewhat insulated from the environment and is not completely subject to environmental contingencies. Thus, high self esteem is associated with integration of the self system and consistency of social behavior. The individual is not a victim of events or does not feel compelled to accommodate the self to the situation.

Persons with low self esteem, on the other hand, do not possess a well-developed conceptual buffer for evaluative stimuli. In Witkin's terms (Witkin, Dyk, Foterson, Goodenough and Karp, 1962), the person with low self esteem is field dependent; that is, he tends to passively conform to the influence of the prevailing field or context. Since the individual's behavior is directly linked to immediate environmental circumstances and is not mediated and integrated through the self concept, he is thereby inclined toward inconsistency (Mossman & Ziller, 1969).

The relationship between self esteem and political candidacy has been discussed at length by both Lasswell (1930) and Barber (1965). Lasswell describes political figures as suffering from marked feelings of personal inadequacy or inferiority, who seek out political opportunities for compensating for these feelings.

Barber (1965, p. 224) describes two types of political candidates: those who have such high self esteem that they can manage relatively easily the threats and strains and anxieties involved in the role of candidate, and those who have such low self esteem that they are ready to become involved in the extraordinary procedures of political candidacy in order to raise their self esteem. Serious doubts must be raised, however, about Barber's methodology which involved the assessment of interview responses as indicators of self esteem.

The complexity of the self concerns the degree of differentiation of the self concept, or in Lewin's terms (1935), the number of parts composing the whole. Expanding upon the theory of social comparison (Festinger, 1954), it is now proposed that an extended social frame of reference is associated with extended self dimensionality, and that extended self dimensionality is associated with an extended social frame of reference or potential for responsiveness to the social environment. In the process of establishing similarities and contrasts with a wider variety of others, a more highly differentiated self-social concept evolves. Obversely, a more highly differentiated self concept is expected to be associated with a greater number of perceived similarities with another and potential for responsiveness because of the higher probability of matching facets of the self and other. Extrapolating from a series of unpublished experiments by Alex Bavelas of Stanford University concerning the etiology of superstition, it is proposed that persons with more complex theories of the self assimilate new information into the cognitive system with greater facility; that is, they are more responsive to their environment.

Direct support of the hypotheses associating complexity of the self concept and responsiveness to diverse others is provided by a study by Thompson (1966). Persons with complex as opposed to simplex self concepts (complexity of the self concept was measured by enumerating the number of adjectives checked as descriptive of the self), were found to perceive strangers twenty years their senior as being more similar to themselves. Also children with complex as opposed to simplex self concepts were found to be more sociometrically popular (Ziller, Alexander & Long, 1966).

The four cells generated by high-low self esteem and high-low complexity of the self concept provide gross categories of the relative responsiveness of persons with these patterns of self-other orientation. Thus, the high self esteem, high complexity cell includes individuals with differentiated and integrated theory of social behavior. The high-high person is capable of assimilating new information concerning the self without jeopardizing the self system. These persons may be assumed to be responsive within moderate limits.

The low self esteem, high complexity cell is assumed to describe the person with a very tentative theory of social behavior, a person who is responsive to a wide range of social stimuli, in terms of political behavior, a person who is responsive to a wide range of social stimuli.

The high self esteem, low complexity quadrant is assumed to include persons with a closed theory of behavior. They are generally nonresponsive. Rokeach's Dogmatism Scale (1960) may also be describing these individuals who render absolute rather than tentative judgments. With regard to political behavior, the ideologue is included within this cell.

It is somewhat more difficult to characterize succinctly persons in the low self esteem,low complexity cell. It is tentatively proposed that they are highly responsive within a narrow range of social stimuli.

A framework similar to the coordinate analysis of responsiveness presented here is Lewin's (1935) theory of differentiation-integration. Development was described by Lewin as including an increase in the number of the relatively independent subparts of the person (differentiation) and increasing the unity of the person (integration or organization).

Integration is not simply a reversal of the differentiation process. Through integration an interdependence among the different systems of the person emerges and a restructuring of the entire system occurs. In the subsequent course of differentiation, however, new centers of the personality are developed out of the new personality structure. The process is cyclical and results, usually, in ever increasing levels of development.

Nevertheless, the integration of the person during development is not a simple restructuring of the inner personal system. Instead, it is a process by which a certain system (or subsystem) becomes dominant by imposing patterns of action related to certain needs. Here, as in the concept of self esteem as used in the self-other orientation framework, integration is described by Lewin as including a control function. Differentiation (and self complexity) is followed by integration (self esteem) which functions

as a reorganizing process which helps to reintroduce a degree of control by the individual over increasingly complex interrelationships among subparts and subsystems of the personality.

More recently, Witkin, Dyk, Faterson, Goodenough, & Karp (1962) and Schroder, Driver, & Streufert (1967) introduced differentiation and integration as central concepts in their theories of personality, although the constructs are confounded with each other in both theory and measure. The similarity between the present framework and Piaget's concepts of assimilation and accommodation should also be noted (1947).

The present study explores the patterns of self-other orientation which occur most frequently among persons holding political positions. The findings are then cross validated with regard to winning an election for political office. Political districts in the region studied (Oregon), were assumed to be pluralistic. Thus, it was hypothesized that winning political candidates tend to be pragmatic or responsive politicians (low self esteem, high complexity of the self concept). In addition, changes in self esteem were analyzed in association with winning or losing an election for political office.

Method

Subjects:

The subjects included 91 politicians who had already won the primary election and were candidates in the general election for the legislature of the State of Oregon, 104 male elementary and high school teachers, 150 male school principals, and 44 school superintendents. The teachers were always from the same school building as one of the principals who in turn were usually under the supervision of one of the superintendents in the sample. The teachers selected were from the same school as one of the principals on the basis that they were closest in age to the principal.

The sample of school personnel were selected from the states of Oregon, Nevada, Washington, and Idaho. The school communities included in the sample were determined in part by geographic proximity. Eighty-two per cent of the public school personnel approached agreed to complete the instruments and returned them to the research organization. The sample of politicians represents 90 per cent of the candidates in the general election for state legislature approached by the data collectors. It was assumed that the public school superintendency is a political position not unlike that of the state legislator (Wriston, 1959) in terms of the presses on the position with regard to responsiveness and conflict resolution in a pluralistic community. Indeed it may be said that a superintendent of school is a politician without benefit of political party. The teachers and principals were selected as a convenient control group of adult males. It was assumed, however, that the role of teachers was least associated with the role of politician.

Procedure:

The data collector traveled to the community of the subjects and usually approached the subject personally concerning his participation in the study. The data collector was preceded by a letter explaining the nature of the project in general terms. The directions on the cover of the Self-Other Orientation Tasks for school personnel were: "The questions which follow are designed to provide an indication of the way you look at yourself in relation to significant other people. In this description of yourself and others, words are avoided. This is a social psychological instrument designed for research purposes only. Hopefully, it will tell us something about differences in the perceptions of self and others among educators in the states of Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. This instrument has been approved by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education. Please work as quickly as possible. It should require about fifteen minutes or less."

The political candidates usually completed the form while the data collector waited. School personnel returned the forms to the university office of the project director.

The measure of self esteem was administered twice to a sample of 44 political candidates; once about six weeks before the general election and a second time two to four weeks after the general election. The latter sample was determined simply on the basis of proximity to the data collector and availability.

Measures:

The measures of self esteem and complexity of the self concept were derived from two instruments in the Self-Other Orientation Tasks (Ziller and Grossman, 1967; Ziller, Long, Ramana, and Reddy, 1968).

The index of self esteem (See Ziller, Hagey, Smith & Long, 1969) was derived from four items in which the subject is presented with a horizontal array of circles and a list of significant others such as doctor, father, a friend, a nurse, yourself, someone you know who is unsuccessful. (The remaining sets were (a) someone you know who is a good athlete, someone you know who is popular, someone you know who is funny, someone who knows a great deal, yourself, someone you know who is unhappy; (b) an actor, your brother or someone who is most like a brother, your best friend, yourself, a salesman, a politically active person; (c) someone you know who is cruel, a judge, a housewife, a policeman, yourself, your sister or someone who is most like a sister.) The tasks require the subject to assign each person to a circle in the horizontal array. The score is the weighted position of the self. In accordance with the cultural norm, positions to the left are associated with higher scores. Significant other persons provide the social context for self evaluation and also serve to mask the intent of the item.

Children in both American and Asian Indian cultures have been found to use the left-right spatial paralogic. Low status others are located on the extreme right of the horizontal array a disproportionally higher percentage of the time (Ziller, Long, Ramana, & Reddy, 1968). It has also been found that sociometrically unchosen children tend to show lower self esteem than highly chosen children (Ziller, Alexander, & Long, 1964). Moreover, neuropsychiatric patients in comparison with normals, and depressed patients in comparison with other neuropsychiatric patients show low self esteem (Ziller, Megas, & DeCencio, 1964). Also, neuropsychiatric patients who participate most frequently in a group discussion were found to have higher self esteem than those who participated less frequently (Mossman & Ziller, 1968). Finally, persons with high self esteem in comparison with those with low self esteem were more consistent in their frequency of participation across group therapy sessions (Mossman & Ziller, 1968).

The measure of complexity of the self concept presents an adjective check list form of 110 high frequency adjectives selected from the Thorndike-Lorge Wordbook (1944). The subject is asked to check each adjective which he thinks describes himself. The measure of complexity of the self concept is the total number of words checked. The concept and measure derive from a study of accuracy of perceptual recall (Glanzer & Clark, 1963) in which it was suggested that the length of subject's verbalizations may serve as an index of perceived complexity of the stimulus. A similar assumption was made by Zajonc (1960). It has been found that persons with high complexity of the self concept tend to be more popular (Ziller, Alexander, & Long, 1966),

have had a wider range of social experiences (Golding & Ziller, 1968), use wider category widths, and identify with a wider range of others (Thompson, 1965), and require more time to reach a decision in an information search-group decision making situation (Smith, 1967). It has also been found (Ridgeway, 1969) that persons who check a greater number of adjectives as descriptive of the self also rate themselves higher on a self report measure of complexity of the self concept, and draw more lines connecting a circle which represents the self to circles which represent other people. Finally, a Pearson correlation of .50 ($P < .05$) was found between complexity of the self concept and perception of the self as located within as opposed to outside a field of significant other people. (Golding, Ziller, 1968).

Corrected split-half reliability coefficients in the present sample of subjects for self esteem and the complexity of the self concept were .90 and .92 respectively. Self esteem was also found to be negatively correlated with complexity of the self concept ($r = -.28$, $P < .01$).

Results

Changes in the self esteem of political candidates were analyzed with regard to the experience of winning or losing the general election. (See Table 1). Candidates who were elected to office tended to gain in self esteem, 15 increased, 4 decreased, and 4 remained unchanged whereas candidates who were not elected increased in self esteem a lower percentage of the time and decreased in self esteem a higher percentage of the time (8 increased, 11 decreased, and 2 remained the same, $X^2 = 6.01$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). It is noteworthy that the eight candidates who failed to be

elected yet increased in self esteem were all non-incumbents. The publicity associated with candidacy may be reinforcing.

Insert Table 1 about here

In analyzing the frequency of occurrence of patterns of self esteem and complexity among teachers, principals, superintendents, and legislators (candidates who had been elected), the distribution of scores of the total sample (including candidates who lost the election) was divided with reference to the mean, and the frequencies with which the patterns occurred were tabulated (see Table 1). Only the political candidates who were elected to office were included in this analysis, however. It was readily noted that the high complexity, high self esteem pattern occurred with lower frequency among superintendents and legislators. In order to test the significance of this observation, the four categories of subjects were analyzed with regard to high and low self esteem and high complexity and with regard to high and low self esteem and low complexity (See Table 1).

The results with regard to high complexity are statistically significant ($X^2 = 4.12$, $df = 1$, $p < .04$) and indicate that superintendents and legislators in contrast with principals and teachers were described by the high complexity, high self esteem pattern proportionately less frequently.

The results with regard to low self complexity were not statistically significant.

In an effort to cross validate the previous results the total sample of political candidates (not merely legislators) was divided according to the outcome of general election. (See Table 2) Again only the results with regard to high complexity were statistically significant. ($X^2 = 9.95$ df = 1, $p < .002$). Those elected to office showed the high complexity, high self esteem pattern less frequently, but showed the high complexity, low self esteem pattern more frequently. It must be noted that of 18 high-high candidates only 5 (28%) were elected, whereas of 16 high complexity, low self esteem candidates 14 (88%) were elected.

Insert Table 2 about here

Finally, it was noted that of the 31 incumbents who were candidates for re-election only one of them lost. The personality pattern of the non-elected incumbent was high self esteem, high complexity.

Discussion

Quite unexpectedly, it was observed consistently that the high self esteem, high complexity of the self concept pattern of personality was associated with non-election to a political office or non-appointment as public school superintendent. The high-high pattern appears to indicate the a-political personality. On the other hand, as initially proposed, the high complexity, low self esteem pattern (the pragmatic politician) appears to indicate the political personality, or at least the personality pattern associated with the highest probability of election to office.

The results are somewhat opposed to those of earlier studies which used a single variable approach and suggested that low self esteem is associated with political candidacy because of the need for reassurance (Barber, 1965, pp. 224, 243). Table 2, for example, shows that self esteem does not differentiate between those elected or not elected with regard to candidates with low complexity of the self concept.

Of course, previous investigators have used observations or self reports as measures of self esteem as opposed to the more indirect, limited verbal approach described here. Under conditions of self report, some persons proclaiming high self esteem are simply describing what they half-believe themselves to be and would like to be, but they need continual confirmation (including self reports) in order to buttress their unsure self image (Maslow, Hirsh, Stein, & Honegmann, 1945).

The results are also somewhat incongruent with the theoretical frameworks of Lewin (1935) and Schroder, Driver, and Streufert (1967). The latter theorists suggest that the highest level of adaptation is achieved by persons whose life space is highly differentiated (high complexity of the self concept in terms of self-other orientation) yet highly integrated (high self esteem here), the a-political personality in the present framework. It is now maintained that the focus of the earlier frameworks was individual adaptation within a social environment where the individual may select social encounters to a greater degree than a politician. The results of the present study suggest that the low self esteem, high complexity personality pattern may be more viable in the social-political environment in which social responsiveness is a critical social demand.

The politician is required to be other directed, aware of a multiplicity of social presses since he is usually a member of a pluralistic political district.

Of course, legislators may take different roles within the legislature which may be associated with different self-other orientation patterns. For example, legislators who are responsible for initiating, formulating, and seeking approval of new public policies (the lawmaker in Barber's terms, 1965), may be described by the high self esteem, high complexity grouping. These legislators "are freed by virtue of exceptionally strong personal resources--particularly a deep sense of personal identity and self-acceptance--to deviate from the common path precisely because they are in possession of powerful techniques for dealing directly with accompanying strain (Barber, 1965, p. 224)." Of course too, other samples of politicians at different levels on the political structure and in different political units must be studied to examine the generalizability of the results.

In Reisman's (1954) terms the high self esteem, high complexity personality is inner directed. He is also less responsive to diverse others thereby reducing markedly the probability of election or appointment to political office in a pluralistic social unit.

The two components of self-other orientation, self esteem and complexity of the self concept, have been interpreted throughout as being associated with Lewin's concepts of integration and differentiation. The four cells generated by the intersection of these bifurcated measures permit a more systematic analysis of the differentiation-integration "nexus" than was

heretofore possible. The results of this study suggest that high differentation, high integration of the self concept is associated with the inner-directed personality. The initial theoretical analysis suggested that high integration, low differentiation was associated with dogmatism, and high differentiation, low integration with social responsiveness. The fourth cell was not readily interpretable. It remains, however, to extend the meaning of these cells experimentally. Most significantly, however, the long held theoretical framework involving differentiation-integration assumes new promise in conjunction with the associated measures of complexity of the self concept and self esteem which emanated from a self-other orientation framework.

Footnotes

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[2]We are deeply indebted to the school personnel and the political candidates who graciously cooperated in this study, to Gary Gregor, Daniel Langmeyer, and Peter Shockett who helped in the data collection phases of the project, and to Dr. Joseph McGrath, University of Illinois, who shared his insights with us in the early stages of data analysis and interpretation.

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Table 1

Frequency of Personality Patterns Involving Self Esteem and Complexity of the Self Concept Among Teachers, Principals, Superintendents, and Legislators

			Self Esteem	
			High	Low
Teachers	Complexity	High'	28	21
		Low	33	22
Principals	Complexity	High	41	28
		Low	48	33
Superintendents	Complexity	High	4	11
		Low	17	12
Legislators	Complexity	High	9	11
		Low	19	19

X^2 (Teachers & Principals vs. Superintendents & Legislators, high complexity only) = 4.12, d.f. = 1, p < .04.

Table 2

Frequency of Personality Patterns Involving Self Esteem and Complexity of the Self Concept Among Elected and Non-Elected Political Candidates

Elected	Complexity	High	5	14
		Low	22	14
Non-Elected	Complexity.	High	13	2
		Low	10	11

X^2 (High Complexity Elected

vs

High Complexity Non-Elected) = 9.95, df = 1, p < .002

X^2 (Low Complexity Elected

vs.

Low Complexity Non-Elected) = .51, df = 1, n.s.